



25 September 2017

By email to: Port Stephens Councillors  
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**RE: COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS – PSC ORDINARY MEETING  
26 September 2017**

**Agenda Item 3. Council Meeting Cycle**

The previous Council soon after its election in 2012 dispensed with a system still embraced by many other Councils in our region and across NSW, whereby a Council meeting was held on the second Tuesday of the month which was classified as a 'Committee of the whole' followed by an Ordinary Council meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month. Click [HERE](#) for Lake Macquarie meeting schedules and system.

Under this abandoned cycle Agenda and Council papers were released to the Councillors on a Friday evening at 5:00 PM and on the second Tuesday the Agenda was discussed in an informal manner where Councillors could ask staff questions, speak more than once, etc. A vote was still taken on each issue, but it was only a recommendation to go to an 'Ordinary Council Meeting' two weeks later. Port Stephens Councillors are urged to look at the websites for other major NSW Councils who have this meeting cycle - Newcastle City, Port Macquarie, Central Coast, North Sydney, Lane Cove, Hornsby, Mid Western Regional, Northern Beaches, Mosman, Lismore, Queanbeyan-Palerang (We have not done a complete audit of all the NSW councils)

The 'Ordinary Council Meeting' would be held on the last Tuesday of the month and would deal with the same agenda and recommendations, but could amend or debate those recommendations again before making a final decision on them in a formal manner.

This option allowed sufficient time for Councillors to fully consider complex issues, get advice from staff and to consult with the community. They had time to do their homework before they had to vote. This also allowed the public and organisations like TRRA to consult with their membership and to consult with their Councillors on the more contentious issues in the fortnight between meetings.

The cycle of two ordinary council Meetings on the second and last Tuesdays of each month is recommended in Item3 for the term of the incoming council. This Option provides for Council going into 'Committee' immediately before the formal vote at the Ordinary Council meeting. This allows voting blocs or those 'in the know' to railroad things through the system before proper consideration is given to issues or any reasonable opportunity for consultation with the public. There is also pressure on the other councillors to make ad hoc decisions that they don't fully understand. A consequence in the last Council was chaotic Ordinary Council meetings with acrimonious debate by councillors and a public gallery packed with angry residents and ratepayers who felt they had been left out of the process. There was frequent suspension of Council meetings by the mayor to keep order. Rescission motions were common.

A classic case in point was the last Council meeting where there were 946 pages of Council papers which included two contentious Flood Mound developments that were

recommended refusal by Council Staff. One was passed and one refused. A rescission motion was moved forcing another special meeting the following week. A Councillor that refused the motion at the first meeting reversed his/her vote and it was passed at the following special meeting.

Regrettably, the Agenda paper has not included the pre-2012 cycle as an option. TRRA considers that the recommended cycle in Agenda item 3 is a sub-optimal 'furphy' and not in the best interests of informed decision-making by Councillors or of considered community input. Under this option only 4 days are available for consideration of often complex issues, policies and lengthy strategy documents. (The 4-day period includes the weekend where Councillors and the community typically have many other commitments limiting the time for effective consultation).

TRRA was encouraged by the strong support by candidates at our Meet the Candidates Forum for a cycle along the lines of that followed by the Councils listed in Paragraph 2, reverting to the preferable cycle followed before 2012.

**TRRA strongly urges Councillors to reject the recommendation in Item 3 of the Agenda papers and to adopt a cycle where Council meets as a committee or committees on the second Tuesday to develop recommendations for final decision at an Ordinary Meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month. (refer in particular to the Lake Macquarie description).**

### **Webcasting of council meetings**

A proposal to reinstate live webcasting is not listed among the Agenda items for this meeting. There was virtually unanimous support for webcasting shown by candidates prior to the election and Mayor Palmer has given public assurances that it will be reintroduced.

Councillors who look up the websites of the Councils listed in paragraph 2 will note that most offer live webcasting.

Aside from the convenience factor of not having to travel to Raymond Terrace to attend meetings, TRRA feels that reinstating the webcam would lift the standard of debate and the conduct of meetings, if all were aware that proceedings were being broadcast live and a record was being kept of who was supporting what.

**TRRA urges councillors to formalise their support for this initiative.**

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President

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